

CHAPTER -1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction of the Bodo and Bathou Religion

The Bodo tribe is the largest tribal group of Assam. From the second millennium of BC, Bodo are started to settle in plain areas of Assam. “According to the 1971 census, the Bodo are the 8th largest tribal group in the India and Bodo language is spoken by 8, 67,017 persons.”¹ The Census report of 2011 shows the Bodo population nearly 2 million in Assam. “There are 14, 16,125 Bodo populations in Assam (Census-2011) and the total Bodo speakers of Assam is 4.53 percent.”²

The majority of Bodo residents are generally in the Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa, Udalguri, Goalpara, Sonitur, Lakhimpur, Dhemaji district of Assam. Besides of these districts some sections of Bodos are reside in other districts of Assam. West Bengal, Nepal and Tripura are also the other residence of the Bodo. They had ruled a kingdom from Cooch Bihar to Naga Hills establishing a capital at Dimapur. “ They ruled the whole of Assam up to the twelfth century A.D. and moved to the western part of the Brahmaputra valley, North Cachar Hills and the plains of Cachar in the sixteenth century A.D”³

Suniti Kumar Chatterji writes the Bodos who spread over the whole of the Brahmaputra valley and North Bengal as well as East Bengal, forming a solid block in North-eastern India, was the most important Indo-Mongoloid people in Eastern India, and they form one of the mainbases of the present day population of these tracts. “The Bodos appear first to have settled over the Brahmaputra valley, and extended west into north Bengal (in Koch Bihar, Rangpur and Dinajpur districts) and they may have pushed into North Bihar also.”⁴ Rev. S. Endle mentions on his ‘*The Kacharis*’ (1991, reprint) that “the Bodos migrated to the valley from their homeland Tibet and China”⁵ He pointed the first flow was into western Assam via North-East Bengal through the valley of Tista, Dharla, Sankosh river and the founded the powerful kingdom of Kamrupa, the second flow was through the Subansiri, Dibang and Dihang river into the Eastern Assam and they also founded a powerful Chutia Kingdom.

Linguistically Bodo are belonging to Tibeto-Burmese language group. Culturally they are from Indo-Mongoloids. The Bodo language is a Sino-Tibetan

language family. They used Devanagiri script for writing. The Bodo language has got the recognition language as one of 22 Indian languages in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution.

Bathou religion is a folk religion of the Bodo and it is one of the oldest religions of the world. This religion is practiced among the Bodos from generation to generation without any priest. There is no any sacred literature of Bathou religion. They have no any fixed place for worship like temple or church.

Bathou is a surrounding of bamboo fence like circle. There are five steps of fence and eighteen pair of posts centering a Sijou plant. A Zatrashi plant also planted at the left side of Sijou and a Tulunshi plant also planted at the right side of the Sijou.

The followers are belief that Bwrai-Bathou is the supreme of god and he is invisible in form. The Sijou plant is planted as the symbol of Bwrai-Bathou. Zatrashi plant is planted as the symbol of wisdom and knowledge and Tulunshi is planted as the symbol of truth and purity.

Bathou has five elements of gods and goddess Ailong (earth), Agrang (water), Khwila (air), Sanja Bwrali (fire) and Raj Khungri (sky). Including these five elements they belief that Bwrai-Bathou is the supreme god of them. The five knots of Sijou also represent of these elements.

Bihuram Boro writes his '*Gibi-Bithai*' (1984), the word Bathou comes from combining of different words. Like- 'B' from 'Bar' (air), 'A' from 'Ha' (earth), 'T' from 'Dwi' (water), 'O' from 'Or' (fire) and 'U' from 'ukhrang' (sky). He wrote that by combining of these words 'Bathou' is generated.

Again the scholars of the Bodo are divided word 'Bathou' into two words 'Ba' and 'Thou'. 'Ba' means 'Five' and 'Thou' means 'Deep' or 'Deep thought'. That means Bathou is combine with two different meaningful words which means is 'Five Deep Thought'.

About Bathou religion different scholars have difined different meanings. Sydney Endle described the worship of Bathou as 'animist'.⁶ Premalata Devi writes on '*social and Religious Institutions of Bodos*' (2004) that "Edawart Stack also said Bathou religion is animistic. But R.N. Mosahary said Bathou religion is not animistic,

it is a Bathouism”⁷. Promod Ch. Bhattacharyya also said Bathou is an animistic. They are worshipers of Bathous, the Supreme God. The meaning of animism is something more than what ever they said. “The word ‘animism’ derived from the Greek word ‘anima’ means ‘soul’, which refers to the belief in the existence of such transempirical souls or spirits.”⁸ In ‘*Compact Oxford English Dictionary*’ (2014) animism means the belief that all things in nature, such as plants and hill, have a soul. Taylor says – “Animism is, in fact, the groundwork of the philosophy of religion, from that of savages up to that of civilized men.”⁹ Animism means “worship of stones, trees and animals in the belief that these are abodes of spirit, goods or evil.”¹⁰ In traditional Bathou religion also worship the Euphorbia Splendens (Sijou) as the symbol of Bwrai-Bathou. The worshippers are beliefs the Bwrai-Bathou is the supreme god of the world. Like other tribals of India, Bodo are also beliefs the immortality of the life, re-birth, law of Karma etc. They are believed that after death the soul of the body enters into the body of some animal, bird and other things.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

The aims and objectives of the study are

- (i) To study the archetype of Bathou altar
- (ii) To study the ritualistic aspects of the Bathou religion
- (iii) To study the philosophical aspects of the Bathou religion
- (iv) To study the oral literature, originality and negotiation
- (v) To study about the various influence on the Bathou religion.

1.3 Hypothesis of the study

Hyphothesis is very important part of research work. Through this research the following hypohthesis are predictable to set up.

- (i) The main roots of the Bathou religion from which it has been transformed generation to generation without founder and organization since time immemorial.
- (ii) The archetype of Bathou is a unique form from other religion.
- (iii) Philosophical aspect reflected in Bathou religion will be discussed and analyzed.

- (iv) Organizational approach and Folk literature, originality and negotiation will be analyzed.
- (v) Aspect of rituals of Bathou religion will be analyzed.
- (vi) Various influences on Bathou religion will be discussed.

With the above mention hypothesis, the researcher expects that all these will be come out effectively and faithfully in the result.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Numerically Bodos are counted as more than two millions. They are said to be aborigine of the state of Assam. Religion has been playing significant role in the life of Bodo. Their original religion is Bathou and they worship Bathou as supreme god since time immemorial. From the view point of traditional religion it is very significance to study the entire process of ritualistic and philosophical aspect of Bathou religion and its transformation from generation to generation. So this study will open new scope of accessing in wider perspective to the new generation to understand the civilization of the Bodo.

1.5 Methodology

Methodology is the most important subject for research work. The present study is undertaken through the analytical research method. The data are collected from the both primary and secondary sources. The primary data collection have been applied in the study of participant, observation, interview mainly concentrated among the senior people of the villager. Participant has been done at the village performance. As a belonging to the worshiper of traditional Bathou religion, it has become easy to approach the primary data.

As the collection of secondary data, the library work has been done at different libraries, Krishna Kanta Handiqui library of Gauhati Universit, Modaram Bramha Central Library of the Bodoalnd University and Bongaigaon college library. Previous research reports, newspaper, magazine and journal as well as the Internet are also applied for the collection as secondary sources. The philosophical aspects of the Bathou religion is studied and analyzed from the secondary sources.

1.6 Statement of the Problem

The problem of the study primarily concerned with aspects of rituals, philosophy and archetype of the Bathou religion. Bathou religion is controlling the traditional customs of the Bodo. Still today, there is no any clear research work by the scholars about the context of archetype of Bathou and their beliefs. There are no available written records of book form and no uniform about the archetype of Bathou and about the philosophical aspects of the Bathou.

1.7 Review of literature

Every religion has its own sacred literature. It incorporates essential principles and theological explanation of a religion. As 'Bathou' religion has neither founder priest nor date of foundation, there are no historical evidences about the origin of Bathou religion. Bathou religion has no sacred literature of its own. Bathou is the way of life of the Bodo society. Its custom and tradition has been transformed from generation to generation through rites, rituals and festivals in the society. There are no adequate written literatures about the Bathou religion.

Few works on Bathou religion and culture had carried out by some foreign scholars and considerable studies on the different aspect of lives of Bodos are seen to be carried out by the North-East India. Some comprehensive studies made by the scholars of Bodo community have been found.

The persons from Bodo community who have made comprehensive studies on the religion and culture of the Bodo can be named as follows, Bihuram Boro, Ramdas Basumatary, Mahini Mahan Bramha, Bhaben Narzee, Kameswar Bramha, Premananda Mushahary, Mangalsing Hajoary, Sekhar Bramha etc.

Among the scholars from Bodo community Bihuram Boro made comprehensive studies on his Book '*Gibi Bithai*' (1984) on the Bathou religion. This book has great survival value of Bathou religion. '*A Study in Cultural Heritage of the Boros*' (1998) and '*A study in cultural heritage of the Boro*' (1992) by Kameswar Bramha outlines the important information about the Bathou religion.

Rev. Sidney Endle tried to study about the Bathou religion in his book '*The Kacharis*' (1991) and he said Bathou as animist from his point of view. Literature on

Bathou religion has been found in the Book '*Social and Religious Institutions of Bodos*' (2004) wrote by Premalata Devi. She gave adequate logic in favore of religion against the term "animist" leveled by some scholars. Nabin Chandra Sarma also proved his analytical study on the various oral songs of the tribals on his '*Oral Songs of the Tribal Communities of Assam*' (2006).

In '*Folk literature of Bodos*' (2001) by Anil Boro write about the oral literature of the Bodo and their folk song, about charms, riddles, proverb etc. Promod Chandra Bhattacharya has also provided some important literary works to study on Bathou. Sherkhar Bramha in his book '*Religion of the Boros and their socio-cultural transition*' (2006) tried to present some facts and information about the traditional Bathou religion and influence of popular religion on it. Mohini Mohan Brahma's '*Folk songs of the Bodos*' (1960) tried to exponent about the seasonal folk songs and rites and rituals and prayer song of the Bathou religion.

Ramdas Basumatary has also provided some important literary work to study in his '*Swrzi arw Santhou*' (2002). In this collection of literary work are proved about the structure of the Bathou Altar, about philosophical thoughts, and charms. Bakul Chandra Basumatary's '*Bathou and religious transitions of the Bodos*' (2018) also proved to know about the transition of the Bathou religion and the various influences on the Bathou religion.

Indramalati Narzaree's '*Boro Harimu Arw Thunlai Bijirnai*' (2005) also provides informations about the Bathou religion and their seasonal and religious festivals. It is collections of on culture and criticism of literature. The book gives us informations about the benevolent and malevolent deities of the Bodos which are believed by the Bodo society. The book is a small volume but very informative on Bodo culture and literature.

There is a great contribution of Bhaben Narzee on his '*Boro Kocharir Somaj Aru Songskriti*' (2006) to the Bodo community. It is a critical study on the various aspects of Bodo society and culture. Bhuben Narzee gives a pen picture of the family worship of Bathou and accompanying Gods and Goddesses. The book is also exponent seasonal and religious festivals and folk songs and ceremonies of the Bodo society. The writer discusses about the system of different types of marriage, social laws and ceremonies of the birth, death and funeral of the Bodo.

Birendra Giri Basumatary's '*Boro Harimuni Mohor Mushree*' (2009) provided the outline history of the Bodo culture. It is also giving informations about the culture, folk literature and other ceremonies extant in the society.

Apart from that, there are many books and magazines which are published on Bathou religion by the Bathou organizations to commemorate various occasions in Anchalic, District and Central level.

1.8 Summing Up

In this chapter, the introduction of Bathou religion, their beliefs and the Bodo community is discussed. They worship the Bathou traditionally. There is no any fixed place of worship like temple or church. It is one of the oldest religions of the world. A Sijou plant is planted as the symbol of Bwrai-Bathou. Along with this Sijou plant a Basil plant and *Justica Assamia* Clarke plant also planted at Bathou Altar. Bathou Aitar is a bamboo fenced surrounding by centering Sijou plant, Zatrashi and Tulunshi plant. They worship Bwrai-Bathou as the supreme god. Along with Bwrai-Bathou other gods and goddesses also worship. Bathou has five elements of gods and goddesses-Ailong (god of earth), Agrang (god of water), Khwila (god of air), Sanja Bwrali (god of fire) and Raj Khungri (god of sky). The five knots of Sijou plant is represented as the five elements of Bathou. The word 'Bathou' is combined into two different meaning '*Ba*' and '*Thou*'. '*Ba*' means 'five' and '*Thou*' means 'deep thought'. Defferent scholars have given different opinions about Bathou religion. But Bathou is a Bathouism. It is a folk religion of the Bodo.

The chapter emphasis, the aims and objectives of the research, hypothesis of the study, methodology and significance of the study, statement of the problem and review of literature are discussed. Bathou religion is playing the significant role in the Bodo society and it is controlling the socio-culture of the society. So, it is very significant to study about the traditional Bathou religion. In this chapter, the general residents of the Bodo and the percentage of Bodo language speakers of Assam are mentioned according to the census report. Bodos are not only found in Assam but also found in other states also like West Bengal, Nepal and Tripura. Linguistically Bodo are belonging to Tibeto-Burmese language group. Racially they belong to Indo-Mongoloid stock. They used devanagiri script for writing. There is no any sacred literature of Bathou. As Bathou religion has neither founder priest nor any historical

evidences about the origin of Bathou religion. Still today there is no any written record of books form about the Bathou. Few works on Bathou religion and culture had carried out by some foreign scholars, from Bodo communities and other communities also.

Endnotes

- 1 Aluckal, Jacob & Pullopillil, Thomas, 1997, *The Bodo: Children of Bhullumbutter*, D.K. Fone Art Press (p) Ltd., Delhi, p.1.
- 2 Mahanta, Parag & Nath, Dhruvajyoti, 2018, *Assam College Teachers`Association*, Annual Multidisciplinary Journal, Bhabani Offset & Imaging System Pvt. Ltd. vol- xl, p. 188.
- 3 Aluckal, Jacob & Pullopillil, Thomas, 1997, *The Bodo: Children of Bhullumbutter*, D.K. Fone Art Press (p) Ltd., Delhi, p. 4.
- 4 Chatterji, Suniti Kr., 2011, *Kirata Jana Krti*, Third Reprint, The Asiatic Society, Kolkata, p. 45-46.
- 5 Endle, Rev. S., 1991, *The Kacharis*, (reprint), p. 3.
- 6 Ibid, p. 33.
- 7 Devi, Premalata, 2004, *Social and Religious Institutions of Bodos*, Geophil Publishing House, Guwahati, p. 31-32.
- 8 Ibid, p. 134.
- 9 Tylor, E.B., 1871, *Primitive Culture*, vol-1, London, p. 426.
- 10 Mohapatra, R.A. 1990, *Philosophy of Religion*, S.K.Ghai, New Delhi, p. 15.